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## For Albertans About Albertans

### 4 Seats

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While being stuck indoors during the long months of winter in Alberta might not be the highlight of our year, it certainly brings us the time we need to work hard and finesse the details in order to prosper in the upcoming show season!

For me, one of my favorite exercises is to have my students practice their 4 seat positions and improve on their transitions from each position to the next in a smooth, disciplined manner.

To start, we must understand what our four positions are, why they are used, and how they are accomplished:



1) Full seat, which can also be referred to as 3 point as there are three points of contact: two legs and seat. This is our most common position, used to maintain the most stability and control. Sitting comfortably in your saddle, your seat, inside thigh and inside calf is in full, even contact with your horse. Heels should be down, a good angle in the knee\*, and just enough angle in your hips to keep your shoulders directly above or slightly in front of your hips (if we were to draw a line straight up from your hips, perpendicular to the ground). Hips must be relaxed in order to follow the motion of your horse and maintain a consistent seat. Hands stay up in front of you so your elbows are slightly in front of your body and there is a straight line from your elbows through your hands to the horse's bit.

\*Your angles will be slightly more open or close depending on your length of stirrup. I encourage you to practice this exercise in both your flat and jumping length in order to properly train your muscles.



2) Half seat, or as I like to call it for my right brain students the "2.5 point" seat as it is the position halfway between the 3 point and the 2 point. You see this very often in the hunters and equitations as it allows more natural movement from the horse than the full seat. Your legs remaining constant with your 3 point position, but now closing your hip angle slightly (roughly 20-30 degrees) rocking from your seat bones to your pubic bone. You remain in contact with your saddle through your legs, but in a much softer seat to allow more freedom and natural movement from our horse through his/her back.



3) Light seat, or as many were originally introduced to it as 2 point. Commonly used for galloping, jumping, and in practice to gain strength in the base of support (legs and ankles). You are now eliminating your seat completely as a point of contact, focusing on your legs and core. Your legs are now bearing all of your weight, and your ankles, calves and lower inside thigh or absorbing the shock of your horse's movement. Your knee and hip angles will open and close with your horse's movement in order to keep control in your upper body position.



4) Driving seat. This seat is an advance seat that temporarily increases leg strength by adding force to the hamstrings at the sacrifice of having a more immobile seat. Commonly seen in instances where a bold move is needed such as quickly increasing stride and power (approaching open water, in first steps of taking a stride out of a line, etc), or on a resistive horse. This seat is accomplished by opening the hip angle from our full seat position, rocking back from your seat bones to your tail bone.

I refer to this position as an advance seat as it should only be used in short intervals, and the proper timing when releasing the driving seat is essential in order to make it effective (as soon as horse gives, the driving seat must give). I refrain from practicing this position with

my more novice riders for this reason, as well as its common misuse to replace lack of lower leg strength.

### Exercises:

Within a walk, practice each position with the goal of each position being consistent, moving softly with the horse while being independently balanced. Independently balanced refers to core strength to hold your position. If you are a little shakey, it is best to balance yourself using your hands on the neck of the horse while you build your strength, avoiding leaning on your reins and therefore balancing on your horse's mouth.

When you are secure and confident there, move into practicing the positions within the trot and canter, emphasizing smooth transitions between each position.

As a progression, you can add these positions with your transitions within gate. For example, Canter in full seat, ask for lengthen of stride and move into your light seat, sink into your half seat and ask for your regular stride, then rock back to your full seat and collect the stride. Think of this as gearing up and gearing down.

### Further progressions:

- Add transitions from gate to gate
- Practice pole and jumping courses with designated spots for each position.

Throughout these exercises, your balance and strength in each position will greatly improve, as well as your knowledge for the strengths and weaknesses of each position so you can make a more educated decision on where you need to be in order to be most effective while conquering any exercise.

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